

Issue needs a local solution

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Rep. Dick Harwood, My Turn

Benewah County has had the same county commissioners for more than 30 years. The prosecuting attorney has been in office for 16 years and the same sheriff who successfully started cross-deputizing with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe in the 1980s is still in office.

What has changed over that time is the tribal leadership. The cooperative agreement on cross-deputizing, which worked well for much of the last 30 years, has broken down in recent years. n amid a lot of finger-pointing and name-calling.

Despite what you might see in news stories and commentaries on this issue, the county officials are not all to blame. They have negotiated and operated in good faith with tribal authorities on cross-deputizing and a variety of other issues for more than three decades.

I have every confidence that, if given the opportunity, county officials and tribal officials can work out an agreement without the legislature's help. Public safety is everyone's concern.

The sticking point has come when tribal deputies ticket non-tribal members and send those cases to tribal court. There are three problems with this practice: First the Supreme Court has ruled repeatedly that tribal police have no authority over non-tribal citizens. Second it violates a citizen's civil liberties and Third it potentially becomes a costly liability to Benewah County. The reason being, you cannot sue a Tribe, but you can sue a County.

I am also concerned about the role of the sheriff should this proposed legislation become law. A sheriff is the chief law-enforcement officer in any county and this proposal appears to undermine that authority. Tribal officials are on the wrong track if they want to set up their version of the State Police, or Fish and Game Department.

Chief Allen, the chairman of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, stated it well to the Spokesman Review. "We're not of the same color, but we all want the same thing: Public safety ♦ That's been our policy from Day 1." From my perspective, public safety has been Benewah County's policy for 30 plus years.

So a working foundation is in place. Let's push the political statements and name-calling to the side and give the local people an opportunity to resolve a local issue.

- Rep. Dick Harwood of St. Maries represents District 2 in the Idaho House of Representatives.